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ABSTRACT

The method used by the American Graduate School of International Management (AZ) to select participants for internships with Japanese companies is described and some case studies are offered as illustrations. The composition of the selection committee is noted, the interview process is discussed briefly (focusing on elicitation of student attitudes, expectations, and cultural adaptability), and the kinds of criteria used to evaluate applicants are examined. These criteria include: (1) attitudes toward an internship and toward interviewers; (2) personality traits that can promote success or create problems; and (3) rules and requirements to be met in each of three departments (world business, modern languages, and international studies). Internship participants' suggestions for successful experiences are offered. They include a sense of humor, willingness to participate actively, and low expectations because of the short duration of the internship. It is noted that the internship in Japan differs from an internship in the United States in that the Japanese internship is likely to be non-task-oriented. (MSE)

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HOW TO SELECT THE RIGHT CANDIDATE FOR AN INTERNSHIP PROGRAM FOR JAPANESE HOST COMPANIES

Presented by Akihisa Kumayama
American Graduate School of
International Management

At the Tenth Annual Conference of
Languages and Communication for
World Business and the Professions
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INTRODUCTION

When choosing a candidate for a Japanese internship host company, a school usually goes through quite an intensive process of selection. The American Graduate School of International Management (hereafter referred to as AGSIM) is no exception.

So far, the process has been fairly successful. One indication is illustrated in an incident which happened quite unintentionally.

It happened that the selection committee of AGSIM interviewed a group of students and recommended a student for a particular Japanese company. Later, without having the results of the selection committee, a representative of that Japanese company interviewed the same group of students. The representative also picked the same student who had been recommended by the school committee.

What are some important criteria in choosing the right candidate? What makes one student more attractive than other students? The purpose of this paper is to indicate some criteria from the committee's point of view, as well to give examples of some cases which have taken place.

SELECTION COMMITTEE

It is very important to realize that the selection committee is composed of members of diverse backgrounds. For example, the selection committee of AGSIM consists of three (3) Modern Language faculty members, the Dean of Students, two (2) World Business faculty members, and the Director of Internship. The more diverse the faculty members, the more different aspects of the student are being observed and evaluated. [1]

INTERVIEW PROCESS

When a committee member asks a question to a candidate, it is often an indirect method of obtaining important information which is crucial. For example, by asking questions such as, "How do you feel about teaching English for the company?" the committee is trying to find answers to the following questions:

1. How adaptable is he/she?
2. Is he/she willing to go an extra mile beyond his/her job description?
3. How will he/she develop rapport with other workers and how much will he/she contribute to the company?

In addition to these aspects, another area which has proved significant is the expectations of the students. The following questions may be used for example:

4. What do you think you will be involved with in the host company?
5. What do you see yourself doing as an intern?

Cross cultural questions related to living in Japan are as follows:

6. Tell us three (3) things you liked about Japan when you were there.
7. Tell us three (3) things you did not like about Japan when you were in Japan.

Because the committee members feel that it is very important for candidates to possess certain criteria for a successful internship, the interviewers evaluate them, placing emphasis on the following aspects: [2]

1. Attitude towards an internship and towards interviewers
2. Personality
3. Academic background
    A. World Business courses
    B. Modern Languages (Japanese language)

Having the right attitude towards the internship and towards interviewers is very important. This is because, in some part, a successful internship is based on the attitude of an intern. In order to show what can happen when an intern's attitude is not on the right track, the following examples are given:

[CASE ONE]

When a student was asked the level of his Japanese langauge, he indicated that his language level was very good and that he would have no trouble participating in his internship. He also emphasized the fact that he used to live in Japan when his father was enrolled as a student in the PhD. program at a Japanese university. Some interviewers felt that the student purposely wished to boost his image by mentioning that fact about his father, although what his father did had no bearing on whether or not he was qualified as a candidate. Later, when the committee members asked the language teacher who had interviewed him in Japanese, the teacher said that the student's language was not very good at all. Because of this, the student scored low on both the language and the interview, and was not selected.

[CASE TWO]

The second case was with a Japanese student. After graduating from a Japanese college, he had worked for a major Japanese electronics company

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for two years, For some reason, two interviewers felt that he had difficulty in communicating in English, although he did not think so. He was too confident in his English ability and did not think he had to improve his English. Overall, his attitude was that because he had worked for a major Japanese electronics company, he was entitled to be selected as a candidate and that the host company would benefit a great deal because of his participation in the internship program. This kind of attitude has proved very unfortunate in the past.

PERSONALITY

Perhaps personality is the most difficult area to evaluate. This is because each member of the committee would most likely have a different opinion from the others on the candidate. The following example will demonstrate this point:

[CASE THREE]

A male student applied for an internship. Because he enjoyed living in Japan as a student, living with his Japanese host family, he felt that he would have great confidence in staying in a Japanese company dormitory if he were chosen. He even stated in his cover letter that he had great confidence in his ability to adjust himself in a new environment.

After the interview, two interviewers felt that the student would be able to perform very well and that he would be a big plus for the company as well as for the school. Two other interviewers, on the other hand, felt that the candidate was very opinionated, telling the interviewers how the internship should be run. One interviewer said that "as an American ,

I don't mind being told how to run a program," but added that this student was the kind of student who would tell others how to run a company if things did not go along his way.

RULES AND REGULATIONS

There are some rules and regulations which the applicant must comply with, when he/she wishes to participate in the internship at AGSIM. There are requirements to be met in each of the three departments, World Business, Modern Languages, and International Studies.

WORLD BUSINESS RULES

At AGSIM, the World Business Department sets rules and regulations with respect to the courses which the students must take or may waive within its department. For example, the seven 3000 level courses must be taken or the students must be waived from them prior to their taking 4000 or 5000 level courses. In scoring for the internship, it is generally held that those who have taken more high level courses, and have done well, will be more successful as interns.

Since it is known that some students purposely avoid taking higher level courses and/or drop them in order to raise their grades or to maintain high grades, usually a World Business faculty member asks why a candidate has been taking an accounting course, for example. If the student responds saying that he has attempted to waive out of the 3000 level finance and accounting courses, but that the teachers in charge of the waivers had said that the courses were taken a long time ago and were no longer valid, then the student is viewed in a more positive light.

MODERN LANGUAGES REQUIREMENT

With respect to the language requirements, the applicant must have either completed or have waived up to JA 4010, advanced Japanese, before going to the

host company. This regulation means that a student, without having had any Japanese prior to his coming to AGSIM, may be able to apply for the program in the third semester.

Although it is true that the higher the level of the candidate is, the more beneficial the internship is going to be for the host company as well as for the student, we have noticed in the past that the higher level does not necessarily guarantee the success of an internship. It is generally true that the higher the level of language, the more meaningful the internship of the student can be. However, cases four and five will show that that is not necessarily true.

[CASE FOUR] [3]

One student had studied Japanese and had lived in Japan for 3 years prior to his coming to AGSIM. Because of his exceptionally excellent Japanese language ability, he was waived from the core courses. We also thought that he would do extremely well in his internship. It turned out that the internship was not fruitful, nor was it beneficial for the host company or the student. What happened was that the student had had very high expectations before going to the host company. He had hoped that the company would place him in the strategy planning group. He had also hoped that the company would put him in the sales strategy division. However, the company placed him in daily-chore-related jobs including making copies and teaching English conversation to the employees. His expectations were never met and he was not happy about the way he was treated. The company was not happy about receiving a student like him because of his dissatisfaction and his unreasonable demands. The company had felt that it was not able to place him in strategic planning because of the confidential nature of the department.

Case four gives the reader a flavor of the fact that higher language skills do not necessarily promise a successful internship. Case five illustrates this idea in a different way.

[CASE FIVE] [4]

Unlike other students, one female student intern had very few expectations whne she went to a Japanese host company, for many reasons: 1) she had never been to Japan; 2) she had not worked for an American or Japanese company before she was enrolled at AGSIM; 3) she had never studied Japanese other than at AGSIM. In her third semester, while she was taking her advanced Japanese, she had an interview for the internship program and left for Japan in her fourth semester.

For the first two weeks at her job, she went to the personnel section and sat there all day long without doing anything. She killed time by reading a book. She waited patiently until the personnel section chief asked her to do some jobs for her internship; she knew the section chief was extremely busy, doing his jobs for the company. She says that one should be well acquainted with employees of the host company before the intern is given many jobs. The Japanese employees do business on the basis of friendship and trust. She got to know them and she became friends with a lot of employees and they trusted her and her opinions. She ended up doing more than other interns because of the congenial relationships between her and personnel employees. For example, she did the following work: 1) writing employment contracts, 2) preparing documents for copywight proceedure and providing a 50 page manual for foreigners, which is being used now in that company.

Another part of the selection process is for the director of internship to match the host company's desire and student's desire. For example, one Japanese company wished to have a female intern and there was a female student who wished to go to that company because it was a cosmetics company. Matching

the student's needs and company's needs is an important consideration.

In conclusion of this paper, those students who had successful internships gave me the following suggestions for successful internships: [5]

1. Have a sense of humor
2. Be active and be willing to participate in activities
3. Have low expectations, because the internship is only 15 weeks for the regular semester and 10 weeks for summer

For example, not understanding mnay things in Japan including the language, business practices and society, the intern would get disappointed often. The intern should be ready to overcome frustrations and a cultural schock.

Many students seem to be very up-tight about teaching English to employees. The intern's objective is to learn how to do business in Japan. However, the fact of the matter is that teaching English conversation opens up possibilities to get to know other employees. By getting to know them better, the intern will get more jobs which are related to the internship program.

It is important to recognize that the internship held in Japan and the internship held in the U.S. are quite different from each other. The typical American internship is task-oriented and the intern is supposed to complete a research or project paper; whereas, the Japanese internship is non-task oriented. In many cases, Japanese companies would not place interns in their strategic planning committees or mergers and acquisitions teams due to confidentiality and due to the short time of the program (10 to 15 weeks).

FOOTNOTES

1. Interview Ms. Barbara Olson, Director of Internship of AGSIM March 1991

2. The selection members strongly felt that these were important criteria to consider in terms of selecting candidates for the internship program.

3. Conversation from Vice President and an employee who were in charge of an internship, March 1990

4. Interview the student who went to a Japanese host company, November 1990

5. Interviews four (4) students who went to Japanese host companies, November and December 1990